

Kleinstueck Preserve Visited by Hundreds of Nature Lovers Yearly

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By Gladys A. Hall

WMO CLASS TOURS KLEINSTUECK PRESERVE TO STUDY WINTER TWIGS —Gazette photo
Anne V. Fuller, Left, Instructor; Many Such Groups Visit Area in Year

By GLADYS A. HALL

A few sunny days this time of year gives rise to all sorts of day dreaming.

The fisherman ponders the advisability of a new trout fly for his favorite water hole or a bass plug less attractive to nightfishing herons.

The gardener has visions of outwitting the mole and of a hybrid that won't cross. Others are anxious to try a new picnic spot, forgetting the mosquitoes and ivy that plagued them last year.

And there are those who dream of walking among trees, along streams, content to watch the miracle of growing things if time and place permit.

For this dreamer we have the place, easily accessible. It is the Kleinstueck Preserve, right in the heart of Kalamazoo.

A wilderness jewel of more than 48 acres, lapped at the edges by civilization, yet completely isolated in its natural flora and fauna. The farm, or Bragg's Nursery, was purchased by the Kleinstueck family in 1885. A few old fruit trees on the northwest side are all that remain of the original stock. The pond, which was more extensive then, was known as Bragg's lake.

The preserve, as we know it, has a varied habitat of deciduous and evergreen trees and fruit-bearing shrubs on the high ground. There is marsh, edge and pond on the lower level, and a small stream flows through from the southwest. Many kinds of trees are represented, the most unusual one being a southern cypress. It was planted by the late Carl G. Kleinstueck, along the path on the northwest corner of the pond. All of this furnishes food and shelter for numerous species of wildlife.

Several groups make use of this natural area for study of conservation and many individuals simply wander through for relaxation.

Classes from State High, Western Michigan and Kalamazoo Colleges go in the year round as well as members of the Audubon Society for field trips. Boy and Girl Scout troops work there for their merit badges in nature.

Following the seasons around, there is something interesting for every month. Stories written in the snow include animal tracks, pellets, and droppings. Holes dug by the squirrels, sumac girdled by cottontails, wing marks in the snow where an owl "pinned" a mouse or shrew. Their struggle for existence is written for all to read. The study of winter twigs, buds, and bark is another interesting occupation at this time.

As spring nears, students clear the paths and "clean the vistas," making it possible for observers to walk in to the water's edge.

Bird migration attracts students of ornithology from far and wide. The composite list of the Kalamazoo College class and the Audubon Society was 126 species for last year. Of the 35 warblers found in Michigan, 26 were seen in the preserve. All of the thrushes were observed last spring, including the water thrushes.

Two of the less common species the winter wren and the Lincoln sparrow stopped by briefly.

In early June a nest survey of the marsh was made by Western Michigan students. A total of 17 nests representing 10 species of marsh birds were found in three hours.

These included the pied-billed grebe, green heron, least bittern

and Virginia rail which are not always so easily found.

Feeding habits and nesting preferences of land birds are studied through the season. Frogs, toads, salamanders, insects and plants are done in turn.

This is particularly a welcome haven to winter visitors, such as the pine grosbeak, pine siskin, and purple finch.

And so the cycle goes.

We are sorry to report that carelessness and vandalism have taken their toll. Nesting stubs around the pond have been cut by skaters for firewood. Though not legally permissible, dogs are allowed to run there the year around, disturbing both birds and animals. Horses are ridden through to the detriment of ground nesting birds. Shooting has been perpetrated and property willfully destroyed. It seems that this might be avoided by patrol and supervision.

Recreation leaders are made available for playgrounds, swimming and baseball. Why not a leader in nature study at the Kleinstueck Preserve? Not all children are interested in games and many individuals, both old and young, would appreciate instruction on both plant and animal life.

There are conservation-minded persons in every adult organization throughout the city who could "spark" and boost this project to a working reality. True conservation is the protection and wise use of what one enjoys.

Let's keep our "little wilderness" a place for all to enjoy now and in the future.

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